

July 29, 2020

Dear Dr. Richmond,

I appreciate your concern regarding the latest issue of the Journal of Schenkerian Studies and its reception by the scholarly community. I will address your questions in two separate categories; in addition, I will also express my own reflections on the situation.

1. What was the board's role in the publication of these essays? Was the board involved in the solicitation or review of these essays?

To clarify, my answer pertains to the essays in the "Symposium on Philip Ewell's SMT 2019 Plenary Paper, 'Music Theory's White Racial Frame'," not the other articles in the same volume.

I cannot speak for the entire editorial board, so I will start by explaining what my personal role was in the publication of the "Symposium" essays. This consisted of three parts:

- a) Beginning on November 15, 2019, I participated in an email exchange, initiated by Timothy Jackson, that eventually led to the Call for Responses that produced much of the "Symposium." The exchange began with Jackson's email titled "Not everyone was enthusiastic about Ewell's talk," and it was sent to a number of UNT music theory faculty. The emails were an exchange of opinions on Ewell's keynote talk. They led to another string of emails, which were directly related to the Call for responses. This string was initiated by Levi Walls, whose initial email (November 25, 2019) was sent to several theory faculty, including some that are *not* on the JSS editorial board. This second email exchange led to the formulation of the Call. I discussed the formulation with the others, but didn't make any substantive suggestions. On my part, I approved the Call on the same day, Monday 25, 2019. After that, I lost track of what happened with the further drafts of the Call, and only received the official Call for Responses via SMT-announce list (on December 31, 2019), which is the standard way to distribute music theory information.
- b) Approximately at the same time when the first email exchange began, that is in mid-November, Jackson began to talk about soliciting responses to Ewell's talk, to be published in the next issue of JSS (which is what ended up happening). I stress that this was *before* the Call for Responses was published via SMT-announce, and before it was even decided that such a call would be sent out. I think (though I cannot be entirely sure) that this informal solicitation happened as part of email exchanges between Jackson and Schenkerian scholars in and outside UNT. Jackson sent to me excerpts from some of these opinion emails in the first email string (initiated on November 15, see above). There were more emails in November and December, including an email string "German scientific racism," which Jackson sent just to me. In the process of these discussions, Jackson suggested that I contact my former PhD adviser William Rothstein,

a notable Schenkerian, to ask if he would like to contribute a response to Ewell's paper. Rothstein refused to do so, in an email to me from December 3, 2019.

- c) At some point in the spring 2020, Walls sent me a draft of the table of contents for the "Symposium." I said that the titles looked inconsistent. (They still do, in print.) I was never asked to look at the essays themselves, only at their titles.

This concludes my participation in the JSS "Symposium on Philip Ewell's SMT 2019 Plenary Paper." I knew that several people were working on their responses to Ewell, but never saw any of these essays, at any stage of their preparation or publication. The next time I heard about the "Symposium" was in a Facebook post on Saturday, July 25. The first time I saw these essays in print was the next day, July 26, when a Facebook friend distributed a scanned pdf copy of the "Symposium."

In summary, I was involved in the solicitation of these essays (though not those that were actually published), but I was not involved in their review.

The facts having been discussed, I now wish to express my own reflections on the process.

First of all, it is hard to distinguish between three things here: (1) what the JSS editorial board did, (2) what the broader Schenkerian community did, and (3) what UNT theory faculty did, in email conversations with Jackson and others. Jackson's and Walls's emails, at least those I myself got, were addressed not so much to the editorial board, but to UNT faculty, including those (like Andrew Chung) that are NOT on the editorial board. At the same time, Jackson alluded, more than once, to other Schenkerians (without naming them) who agreed with his own opinion. In retrospect, I can say that Jackson's (and to a certain extent Stephen Slottow's) actions produced an atmosphere of "we Schenkerians do not agree with Ewell's plenary talk," and this atmosphere was created not just by emails, but also by in-person conversations in UNT music building hallways. To be sure, Jackson himself expressed his disagreement very clearly in his emails, a lot of which later became part of his essay in JSS "Symposium." Jackson was "dragging" people into his "Symposium" project, and they (I should actually say "we") followed with various degrees of enthusiasm or reluctance. I stayed away from active participation in it as much as I could manage it without explicitly telling Jackson and Slottow "Sorry, I don't want to be involved."

As for the rest of the editorial board—the members who are *not* on the UNT faculty—I simply don't know whether they were involved in the formulation of the Call for Responses, or in any other stages of the process. The reason is that there was never a *formal* solicitation of opinions or essay reviews from the editorial board members.

In retrospect, I regret that I did not contact Ewell to ask if he would like to write a response to the responses, or to simply inform him about what is happening in JSS. A lack of such timely contact with Ewell on the part of JSS editorship is part of what is currently being condemned on social media. In fact, I did think of contacting him in December 2019, partly because he is a

long-time friend and a former mentor of mine. But it was a busy time at the end of the Fall semester, I was recovering after an illness, and most of all I thought that such contact ultimately should be made by the editors and the advisory board (that is, Graf, Wall, Jackson, Slottow). So I didn't write to Ewell. Now I think that this inaction was negligence. I should have at least urged the editors to get in touch with Ewell. Also, I now understand that, probably, the whole editorial board should have reviewed the essays at some point, since they engage the extremely sensitive topic of race and the work of a scholar (Ewell) who is courageous enough to publicly show his vulnerability in his SMT keynote.

I also think that a lack of formal communication between the advisory board, the editorial board, and the editors is part of a larger problem. Throughout the three years I have been a member of the editorial board, communication has been extremely inconsistent and unclear. At times, Jackson sends emails, often enormously voluminous, to multiple board members and non-JSS-affiliated UNT faculty, and it is unclear whether a response would be just in the spirit of friendship and collegiality, or whether this is official interaction between JSS officers and board members. Jackson's emails and his Schenker-style graphs attached to them are sometimes so big that it even seems irresponsible to send them and to expect people to read them. It is disrespectful of his colleagues' time. Further signs of inconsistency: in the summer 2017, Jackson asked me to review and/or proofread the entire (!) issue of JSS that was to come out that summer, within one day's notice. Putting off other duties, I read much of the issue within one day of his message and gave substantive comments, after which Jackson informed me that the journal issue has already gone into print, and my comments are too late. I have never felt as unappreciated as I did on that day.

In short, the communication between the advisory board (*especially* Jackson) and the rest of the JSS team is far from ideal. The role of the editorial board is unclear, and Jackson's actions often blurs the boundary between the JSS editorial board and UNT theory faculty.

(I must also say that I was an anonymous reviewer for one of the articles in the latest JSS issue, "The tour-of-key model" by Nicholas Stoia. This review process was very well organized and caused no problems. My contact during this review process was Benjamin Graf.)

2. Does the board endorse these essays?

The essays in the Symposium deal with one (of several) aspects of Philip Ewell's 2019 keynote paper: his discussion of the important music theory Heinrich Schenker (1868–1935). Specifically, Ewell exposes Schenker's racist views. I will give my judgment of several individual essays, rather than all of them together.

I endorse Suzannah Clark's essay "Patterns of Exclusion in Schenkerian Theory and Analysis." It is thoughtful work that deeply engages with problems of systemic racism as related to intellectuals from past eras. She shows that it is imperative to expose prejudice in the work of those thinkers who have become important figures in a scholarly field.

I endorse Christopher Segall's essay "Prolongational Analysis without Beams and Slurs." Segall argues that the role of Schenker himself in the current state of "Schenkerian" analysis is more limited than it is habitually thought. Therefore, Segall offers to dissociate prolongational analysis from Heinrich Schenker and his name. Rather than enforce the "exclusionary" notation of Schenkerian analysis, Segall suggests extracting some useful ideas from the work of Schenker and his followers—prolongation and structural levels, and use them as independent theoretical constructs, not necessarily carrying Schenker's difficult notational system.

I endorse Stephen Slottow's essay "An Initial Response to Philip Ewell." Slottow engages only two points from Ewell's keynote talk: (1) Slottow disagrees that pitch hierarchy in Classical tonality (in general and as seen by Schenker) is analogical to a hierarchy of races (the inferiority of people of color) that Schenker endorsed; (2) Slottow argues that Schenkerian theory is "a living, evolving tradition" that is *not* the same as Schenker's own work and personality. (In a way, this argument is close to Segall's; see above). Many of Schenker's follower have not shared his racist political views. I agree with both of Slottow's points.

I do NOT endorse Timothy Jackson's essay "A Preliminary Response to Ewell." Jackson shows a profound misunderstanding of two concepts: *white racial frame* and *systemic racism*. His discussion of "bringing Blacks up to 'standard'," and especially the statement about "deficiency of background in classical music" in African American communities bespeak a prejudice: Jackson doesn't see that there are different musics, produced by different cultures and racial groups, musics that are fundamentally equal in their inner value. Or, at least, he is uninterested in such equality. Instead, he focuses on Western (European) music alone, and sees one's lack of interest in this music as a "deficiency." In my view, Jackson needs to educate himself in matters of systemic discrimination before writing on these issues. I think I can safely say that his statement about "deficiency" is racist. (This said, I do find some parts of Jackson's essay interesting, in particular regarding the Jewish identity; but I do not consider myself qualified to judge them as right or wrong.) Jackson's false summary, in the same paragraph (p. 163) of Ewell's argument as follow: "liberalism is a racist conspiracy to deny rights to 'people of color'" is abhorrent, unscholarly, and unacceptable. This phrase (like the whole essay) shouldn't have been published.

I endorse the content of the anonymous essay, which states that Ewell's paper produced a wrong impression among many music theorists: that they took it to mean "let's abolish Schenker" (which Ewell did not mean), instead of taking Ewell's true point that white racial frame defines much of the field of music theory, a situation Ewell desires to change. However, the author clearly has not engaged with Ewell's discussion of white racial frame, since they state that most music schools focus on Classical instruments and repertoires, without examining why that is so. If I were reviewing this essay, I would have asked the author to engage with Ewell's central argument more directly.

I do NOT endorse the anonymity of this essay. It is unethical to publish anonymous work in response to a publicly known author.

The five essays discussed above are those I have read completely. I have not had enough time to read and form a clear opinion about the rest of the “Symposium” essays, and it would be irresponsible for me to offer judgment of work I have not fully read. If I were to review these essays in the proper way, I would have much more time, probably several months. Doing so within two days instead, and under extremely stressful conditions related to the JSS reception, is simply impossible. As I have already mentioned, I got access to the essays only on July 26, which is two days ago, and I am rushing to finish this letter as soon as possible. So, I do not endorse the remaining essays simply because I am not sufficiently familiar with them at the moment.

I also feel it is more responsible to judge every individual essay separately because each is written by a different person, rather than lump them together as if they represented some kind of unified view, which they do not.

Most importantly, I do NOT endorse the way in which these essays were put together, and the editors’ and the advisory board’s behavior: the lack of transparency, the inconsistent solicitation of essays, and the fact that the idea of the “Symposium” grew out of Jackson’s displeasure with Ewell’s keynote, rather than out an honest desire to see a variety of views and reactions. I felt this from the beginning (from November 2019) and I failed to let Jackson and Slottow know about my alarm. Part of the reason for this inaction, which I now regret, was that I feared for my own well-being in the College of Music, as an untenured faculty member. I wish to add that Jackson is the only MHTE faculty member of whom I am genuinely afraid, because his actions are not always guided by common professional and personal ethics. From the incident with the JSS “Symposium,” I have learned that I need to use my own head and make my own decisions in any situation, no matter how strange, ambiguous, or dangerous it may be.

I hope this helps you have a clearer view of how the “Symposium” came to be. Please do not hesitate to contact me if any additional information is needed.

Sincerely,

Ellen Bakulina, PhD
Assistant Professor, UNT College of Music